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AUTHOR Cann, Roger J.
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ABSTRACT

The "utopian" area of liberal adult education is being attacked in Great Britain as an expensive service. Two reasons are (1) the weakness of the 1944 Education Act in clearly laying upon local authorities the statutory duty of providing adult education and (2) the blurring of the distinction between vocational and non-vocational provision. Most recently, liberal adult education is seen as not applicable to the problems of today. New training initiatives include a form of liberal adult education, but the learning is directed specifically to the worker as a worker, not as a person with other faculties. Current responses to the technological revolution and subsequent high levels of unemployment are unhelpful since they are based on an outdated view of society. Society fosters the Protestant myth of work and creates a climate where paid work is seen as necessary. It must move to a position where one can choose to work or not. Spending vast sums of money on training is damaging to a country and its people when no jobs are produced and trainees cannot find work. The unemployed need to be incorporated into a coherent social whole where everybody makes a contribution even if they are not in paid employment. (YLB)

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LABOUR AND EDUCATION:
THE VALUE OF UTOPIAN IDEAS

ROGER J CANN, BSc

FOR THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERTS' SYMPOSIUM,
VIENNA, JUNE 1986

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LABOUR AND EDUCATION: THE VALUE OF UTOPIAN IDEAS

"Today there is a palpable need for fully-trained citizens and we have the opportunity to train them. The need is implicit in the responsibilities of a democratic society. The opportunity is provided by the greater leisure of a scientific age. There is here a vital challenge to our educational system. For the training and preparation appropriate to the times must and can extend far beyond the statutory school-leaving age. There are no frontiers to education, a truth that has now become a guiding principle in the public service of education"

Further Education Pamphlet No 8, Ministry of Education 1944

The Adult Education service in Britain was created to provide people with an opportunity to participate more fully in society. In a mature democracy, people would develop their abilities of work, intellect and leisure. In work, education would help in the understanding of the job: how the job fitted into the factory, and how the factory fitted into the economic life of the country. The intellect was to be nurtured so that the connections between work and leisure, banking and industry, government and people, in fact all areas of life, would be understood. If the mutual support of society was to be really meaningful, then people should understand one another and the milieu in which they found themselves. Consequently, leisure was a part of life, and educational opportunities were given to people to rest and recreate the wholeness of life after giving a disproportionate time to only one activity, namely work.

This was only a practical possibility if government could provide financial and moral support to promote the idea. At worst it was a utopian dream that was impossible to provide because of financial hardship or a hostile philosophical environment. Our 1944 Education Act laid down the blueprint for such a comprehensive system of education. The weakness in the Act was that Adult Education was not a statutory requirement, it was only a duty that could be interpreted in various ways. After the war there was a boom in liberal adult education. As early as 1951, the Ministry of Education was becoming unhappy about "recreational" classes.

As H A Jones has pointed out in Education Without End, there had been such a boom in adult education "as to draw the authorities' attention to it".

Since 1951 there has been a battle for the retention of liberal adult education. This service reached its peak in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Two main reasons can be found for the demise of liberal adult education in Britain. First, the weakness of the 1944 Act in clearly laying on Local Authorities the statutory duty of providing adult education, and secondly, the blurring of the distinction between vocational and non-vocational provision. The creation of this distinction can, in my opinion, be traced directly to the 1944 Act when it talked about the "leisure time occupation" from which people were able to benefit. Over the years, "leisure" has been reinterpreted to mean the pursuit of selfish goals that do not lead to community wellbeing.

How has this come about? The Russell Committee was appointed in 1969 to consider the provision of non-vocational education in England and Wales. This report recommended that adult education was "an essential element in the national system of education". The Committee drew no sharp line between vocational and non-vocational study, wanting the service to help people to "develop their knowledge, skills, judgement, and creativity throughout life". The blurring of the division between vocational and non-vocational was further helped by the Advisory Council for Adult and Continuing Education (ACACE) Report Continuing Education: From Policies to Practice. Like Russell, the Report fudges the issue by saying that there is an element of both types of provision in each. The ACACE Report, however, goes further by redefining non-vocational education as "adult general education". Under this definition, non-vocational becomes "general, basic, cultural, physical, social (and) civic". It is interesting to note

that the Russell criteria denote personal attributes whilst the ACACE criteria are more objective.

The Department of Education and Science did not include any new definition for Adult and Continuing Education in the 1981 amendments to the Education Act and indicated their view to ACACE that "both terms are imprecise and we do not believe that widely acceptable definitions can be found". As found in Russell and the ACACE Report, the confusion of content in vocational and non-vocational education fits better to a philosophy of "liberal adult education" with its view that all forms of education are of value to the individual, and therefore the liberal state, and should be supported by the state, than that of "adult general education" which seems to separate out different areas of educational endeavour to be provided separately. The current movement in adult education in Britain is taking us far away from the wholesome ethos of the traditional service. Adult general education does not have the moral authority of "liberal adult education"; it seeks to have training as a state provided benefit, whilst recreational education is self provided and of no particular interest to the Government.

In my country, the idea that the State should have a responsibility to education the whole person is being attacked very strongly indeed. Adults with educational needs are increasingly being seen as problems to be dealt with, or individuals who can or should pay for the educational services they require. The dismantling of the liberal adult education service in Britain is proceeding apace, along with the alterations to health provision, social security provision, other educational provision, and the ability of Local Government to have control over their own administration. There are now frontiers between educational provision. I want to look briefly at how this has happened in the education and training field.

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The spectacular success of the Adult Literacy Scheme in the early 1970s showed how useful a large injection of Central Government funding could be. Mobilising television and radio, tutor organisors, volunteers and students from all walks of life, it demonstrated what could be done when the Adult Education Service was harnessed to a national initiative. The lesson was not lost on Government. First, it could tackle the educational problems of adults to which it gave priority. Secondly, by using selective funding, the Government could make Local Authorities carry out its policies, even if the political complexion of the local council wasdifferent from that of the Government. A lesson learned by Mrs Thatcher when she was Minister of Education and had to deal with intransigent Labour councils.

Two other significant developments of the 1970s were the Open University in 1971 and the Manpower Services Commission in 1974. The Open University (OU) followed the liberal tradition, providing higher education by home study methods for adults in full-time employment or working in the home. It started with 24,000 students and now caters for over 60,000. The Manpower Services Commission has much more influence than the OU as it is the Government's main agent for educational change in the post-school sector. The Commission advises the Government on manpower policy and, with the agreement of the Government, has adopted five main aims: "to contribute to efforts to raise employment and reduce unemployment; to assist manpower resources to be developed and to contribute fully to economic wellbeing; to help secure for each worker the opportunities and services he or she needs in order to lead a satisfying working life; to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Commission". [1]

The MSC was set up before the massive rise in unemployment in the 1980s, but it has been the prime mover in the training and retraining provision for the unemployed. It is in this area that utopian ideas have been

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particularly attacked. The early response to unemployment was training. Such training was general in approach, "to enable people entering at different ages and with different educational attainments to acquire agreed standards of skill appropriate to the jobs available, and to provide them with a basis for progression through further learning".[2] This general approach in Britain was mirrored in Europe. The European Social Fund Guidelines set out general training options for the countries receiving grants.

In March 1984, CEDEFOP[3] organised a conference entitled "Continuing Education and the Labour Market". This conference aimed "in a context of crisis and unemployment, an examination of the relationships between continuing education and training and employment is crucial. It is necessary in this respect to encourage the development and proliferation of initiatives likely to have a positive effect on the labour market: the retraining of job applicants, training designed to provide expertise in new technologies, the development of skills, support for new activities and for the creation of new businesses, contributions to local economic development".[4] Later in the Synthesis Report it states, "It was widely agreed that within the present context of massive unemployment, 'training for jobs' is somewhat problematical in so far as a large number of the unemployed, even those who have been trained, will remain without jobs. It would be dangerous, both from a social and economic point of view, to isolate a fringe which is not 'affected', a priori, by training, within the working or even the unemployed population."[5] The Report goes on to say that training should be understood in a wider sense: training should give attention to social abilities as well as technical and vocational knowledge. The current European Social Fund Guidelines take no notice of this whatsoever. It says that training should be given only where jobs are available. Similarly, the MSC in Britain are also following this line, thereby giving the unemployed a narrower range of choices.

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A number of choices are being offered to reduce unemployment. In Britain we have the Job Release scheme where financial help is given to older workers to retire early and release their job to an unemployed person. There is a job splitting scheme to provide more part-time opportunities. Increasingly, there are schemes to help people looking for work through counselling, coaching on job hunting techniques. There are more traditional ways that have more success on the continent than in Britain, for instance, the 35 hour week, paid educational leave. These measures will not help tackle the real problems of unemployment.

To return to the "utopian" area of liberal adult education. I have said that this service is being attacked, firstly, because it was seen as an expensive service. More recently, however, it is seen as not applicable to the problems of today. Recently, at a conference in London, a spokesman for the Department of Education and Science said the following: "The DES has therefore been reviewing the deployment of its own Adult Education budget and encouraging LEAs and others to do the same ... Since some of the changes resulting from our own review have been interpreted as an attack on liberal education, I must stress that we and our Ministers value this tradition. But we want to ensure that this tradition develops the responsiveness to new needs which already characterise its best practitioners, and we did not feel able to continue with a system which was too apt to promote the continuation of historical patters of supply without regard to changing patterns of need and demand."[6] What this means is that non-vocational adult education is being squeezed out of mainstream grant aided provision. The Workers' Educational Association are having their funding gradually withdrawn and the traditional local authority service is becoming financially self supporting. The Department is pursuing a policy that will take liberal adult education out of the state sector altogether. In my opinion, there is a real

possibility of adult non-vocational adult education becoming privatised, thus taking it out of the reach of the unemployed and pensioners. A very sorry affair indeed.

What then does it mean to say that Ministers value the liberal tradition? Like MSC, the Department of Education and Science are becoming more interested in job-specific training. To this end they have implemented PICKUP to encourage the development of post-experience vocational education for industry and commerce. PICKUP is aimed at colleges, polytechnics and universities. More recently, the Department has promoted REPLAN to "focus the needs of the unemployed. Courses and other activities vary considerably. Many seek to improve the employability of those currently out of work by giving them new skills and knowledge. Many also seek to broaden their appreciation of potential job opportunities."[7] A form of liberal adult education is being included as a part of these new training initiatives.

The spokesman referred to earlier said that there was an identity of interest between vocational and non-vocational education. Liberal education, we were told, can "fulfil the abilities of the workforce", and further, "realising the full potential of the work force was not different in philosophy from liberal adult education. We are not talking about two camps". An example of how this was being provided was given. The Jaguar car company is putting this approach to the test, and has started Open Learning sessions in its three training centres. It already has facilities for teaching a wide range of skills of relevance to its employees, from engineering techniques to foreign languages for its sales force. The company conceived the idea of maximising the use of these facilities by offering courses outside of work time to their employees so that they could improve their chances of promotion in their jobs. Since 1984, twenty percent of the work force have attended at least one course.

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Some people have participated in these courses out of interest. There are several language courses, computer courses that attract a lot of parents and grandparents who want to understand what their children and grandchildren are doing at school, and one particularly nice piece of liberal learning happened when a group of secretaries attended a welding course and left with a self made flower pot each. Ostensibly, they were there to find out about materials they order for workers in the factory. Such "liberal" education has become a component in a training package that takes it out of the realm of utopian ideas. This is because the learning is directed specifically to a worker as a worker, and not as a person with other faculties.

In the preparatory papers for this Symposium, it states "Emancipatory education politics must provide an egalitarian entrance to the labour and education system for the people by means of a wide general knowledge which can be of help in overcoming unequal circumstances". Even if everybody can arrive at the entrance to job opportunities, is there equal opportunity if there are not enough jobs available for everybody? It is now recognised by many that training does not produce jobs. Some, and I count myself among them, believe that high levels of unemployment are here to stay. I also believe that the numbers of people unemployed will continue to rise as new technology becomes more sophisticated. There is yet to be a revolution in office equipment that will make typists and filing clerks redundant. There are also being developed information distribution networks that could virtually do away with letter post as we know it. If present trends continue, we will have a larger number of well paid workers and a growing number of subsistence level non-workers. Our training and education system are developing to make this a reality. Government does not provide educational opportunities to help unemployed people cope constructively with the amount of time they have, and our social security laws actively prohibit their participation in creative activities.

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There are restrictions if people wish to take up voluntary or educational activities. Initially, people involving themselves in voluntary work had their benefit stopped as they were deemed to be unavailable for employment. This caused a great deal of discussion as it seemed silly not to allow unemployed people to do voluntary work and the regulations have now been eased. The only stipulation now is that should a job become available, people must give up the voluntary work they have been doing immediately. In the educational sector, the 21 hour rule stipulates that nobody can study for more than 21 hours a week whilst drawing supplementary benefit. The 21 hour rule not only includes formal education provision, but also time spent at home studying, so this means that if you went to school for sixteen hours a week and studied at home for eight hours, you would fall foul of the benefit rules and you would be deemed to be unavailable for employment. This seems a particularly stupid restriction as the Government is doing its best to see that unemployed people are given access to training. If somebody shows initiative, then they are penalised for it.

Liberal adult education was part of a philosophy that sought to create a united society, where your position in society was secondary to a sense of belonging to a State where everybody had a place and was comfortable in it. Liberal adult education was in the people's interest and therefore in the national interest. As well as the economic problems that have lead to high unemployment, the other attack on the nation state since the War has been the emergence of European unity. The liberal educational ethos was constructed before the War. Political theories abound for the Nation State, from Machiavelli to Mill, but as yet, there is not a comprehensive theory for conditions in a united Europe. We are working our way painfully towards this. There is the European Convention on the Protection of Human Rights, but this does not cater for the problems of unemployment. A new political theory will have to take account of the divisions in European society as political theories took account of the divisions in society in former times.

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Political theories usually follow ethical theories by defining practical outcomes from ethical ideas. I believe that much of our current attitude to work and non-work is derived from the Protestant Revolution. I believe that the protestant work ethic is a real force in society and I also believe that the training response of Governments at the moment is based upon this ethic. Mr Tebbit's famous remark "Get on your bike" is the result of this ethic, which supposes that if you put yourself about, you will get a job. We need a new ethic because the old ethic does not cater for the current industrial situation. A new ethic cannot be based upon a selfish materialist foundation, it must come from a spiritual connection that will acknowledge that the unemployed can contribute to our society, as unemployed people, in a similar way to the way we contribute when we vote and show ourselves to be a part of the same political society.

In the western liberal tradition, work has been contrasted with leisure and recreation. Work is what you get paid for. Work allows you to contribute to society by the payment of taxes. Work defines who you are and what you can do. Work makes you a proper human being. Before universal suffrage, property or money defined your eligibility to vote. Is it possible that the vote will be taken away from the unemployed because they do not contribute to society? There are others who do not contribute to society, the retired for instance. Many would agree that the retired had contributed, and are enjoying the rewards of their labour, and yet even this group of people are having traditional benefits withdrawn from them in Britain. There was a great row recently when the Government tried to discontinue index linked pensions for Civil Servants. It must be said, however, that the number of unemployed and retired drawing money from Government sources has grown enormously over the last few years, while the industrial base that provides the wealth to pay them has decreased.

Unemployed people do not have the economic freedom to participate fully in our consumer society, but they do have other freedoms which those in work do not (have). Many will find the lack of money frustrating and damaging, but they can choose their daily pattern, pursue alternative activities and generally explore new ways of doing things. When the unemployed realise that high levels of unemployment are here to stay, they can turn their energies to more productive use. Unfortunately, society, and especially those in employment, fosters the Protestant myth of work and creates a climate where paid work is seen as necessary. We must move to a position where we can choose to be in work or out of it. Such a choice represents greater freedom than we now enjoy, a freedom that is denied the employed, who think they are free because they are employed, and denied the unemployed because of the rigidity of the employment system.

The unemployed and retired have a lot to offer those of us in work; they are creating a lifestyle that many of us would like. Jenkins and Sherman in a book called The Leisure Shock, look forward to a society where wealth is created by machines which are looked after by a small group of highly trained people. The wealth created is distributed to all those who do not "work" in the accepted sense of the word. This does not mean that the "unemployed" will be idle, far from it. It does imply, however, that we will need a different view of how people contribute to society. In the future it will be necessary for people not to work solely at wealth creation, but to share work around. This is what we are so bad at doing at the moment. People must be able to move in and out of paid work much more easily, and being out of work must be just as attractive as being in work.

The Government base all education and training provision on the supposition that if it is good for industry, it is therefore good for life. This is a complete reversal of liberal adult education, where what is good for life

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is good for industry. It cannot be right to marginalise traditional adult education within vocational training. Our Government, however, think this is right. Recently, Chris Patten (Minister of State for Education and Science) said, "Education in the sense of knowledge, understanding and the development of intellectual skills, is invariably of practical benefit ... Training, in the sense of only developing job specific skills, results in mere automatons without a grounding in that knowledge and understanding which are not just related to a particular job but more generally to adult working life as a whole ... We need education to provide flexibility and broad learning skills ... some continuing general education appropriate to the development of personal qualities such as self-reliance, self confidence and adaptability and of general skills like those of communication."[8] A political statement made by a politician. Training is political and many who participate in Government training courses would like to involve themselves in political debate. The Government do not like this and in their funding of training initiatives have bent over backwards to prevent the unemployed and training organisers becoming political. This is a shortsighted approach. There should be a great deal of official encouragement to the unemployed and those in work to discuss the future of work. At the moment the unemployed are being excluded from this debate because they do not have the resources to travel and meet one another, nor to disseminate any interesting ideas they may have on the future of work. The adult education service in Europe should be well placed to promote this debate; they are not able to do so, however, because Government will not allow money to be used for this purpose.

I have tried to show that our responses to the technological revolution and the subsequent high levels of unemployment are unhelpful as they are based on an outdated view of society. It is damaging to a country and its people to use up vast sums of money on training when it is acknowledged that this does not produce jobs and leaves the trainees demoralised when

they cannot get work after being given the opportunity to do so. We have to consider ways of incorporating the unemployed into a coherent social whole where everybody has a contribution to make even if they are not in paid employment. I have written elsewhere what I think the way forward is.[9] In the terms of the Symposium, it is not sensible to carry out the policies of Britain and some of her EEC partners. The restrictions placed upon the creative ability of the unemployed should be removed. Also, the employed need to enter into a dialogue with the unemployed so that they do not face each other as opponents for scarce resources. A popular debate about the benefits of new technology has been going on for some time. We now need to debate the problems that this same technology is causing us, for instance, high unemployment. At the beginning of this essay, I quoted the fact that there would be "the greater leisure of a scientific age". We are reaping a disproportionate harvest. There are people who are working longer and longer hours, and others who have no work to do. This cannot be right. The measures that are being promoted to create jobs are in many ways correct, the problem is that they are being backed up by the wrong philosophy. The Protestant work ethic is out of date. We must not, as a result of it, penalise people who through no fault of their own cannot get paid work. We need some Utopian ideas to tackle this issue.

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